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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 006976

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [PBTS](#) [CH](#) [IN](#) [RU](#)
SUBJECT: CHINA/RUSSIA/INDIA: PRC TALKS UP TRILATERAL
PROCESS, EVEN AS SUBSTANCE REMAINS UNCLEAR

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Aubrey Carlson.
Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Foreign Ministers from China, Russia and India met in Harbin October 24 for the seventh in their series of trilateral meetings. The role of the UN in the Asia-Pacific region was a key issue in talks, as well as climate change, counter-terrorism and scientific and academic exchanges. The discussion on economic cooperation will continue with a mid-December trilateral economic forum in New Delhi, including discussions on energy cooperation. Russia and China played up the increasingly structured framework, while an Indian Embassy contact suggested it is still a talk-shop. Based on Chinese comments on the meeting, for China the trilateral gathering serves more as a vehicle to emphasize multilateral diplomacy than as a forum to achieve substantive results. Separately, Chinese and Indian officials described India Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi's October 25-29 visit to China as "concentrating on atmospherics." End summary.

¶2. (U) The Foreign Ministers of Russia, China and India met in the northeastern Chinese city of Harbin (Heilongjiang Province) October 24 for the seventh in a series of trilateral meetings. The three FMs issued a Joint Communiqué which outlined the major points of discussion as follows:

- the "international situation" and a reaffirmation of the central role of the UN, including the need to "promote" democratization of international relations,"
- the need to strengthen and reform the UN, with China and Russia "reiterating" the importance of India in the world and their support for "India's aspirations to play a greater role in the UN,"
- development of the three countries and its importance for the development of "global multi-polarity,"
- the need to "safeguard diversity of the world civilization,"
- the importance of "multilateralism and collective action" in addressing global issues, and that "drawing lines on the grounds of ideologies" will not help "solve the various global issues facing the international community,"
- the importance of "common but differentiated responsibilities" in international efforts to confront climate change,
- general discussion on terrorism, Asian regional peace and security, and economic and cultural interactions.

¶3. (U) The FMs also used the Harbin meeting to establish Working Groups at the Director General level to enhance

cooperation on technical issues touching on agriculture, disaster management, health and other issues.

14. (C) According to Russian Embassy Poloff Denis Agafonov, discussion on economic cooperation will continue with a mid-December trilateral economic forum in New Delhi and will include discussions on energy cooperation.

China, Russia: Meetings are "Structured" and "Systematized"

15. (C) Chinese and Russian officials both played up the trilateral talks, stressing that the informal meetings have evolved over the years into a forum for discussing increasingly concrete issues, despite the lack of specific deliverables at the Harbin meeting. Liu Yang, First Secretary in the MFA Department of Eurasian Affairs, told

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Poloff that the trilateral meetings had become "regularized" and "systematized," as evidenced by the establishment of the Working Groups to facilitate coordination ahead of the ministerial meetings. Liu emphasized the importance of the Joint Communiqué as a statement of common interest between the three countries, and pointed particularly to problems such as UN reform, stability in Afghanistan, counter-terrorism and the need to coordinate on "developments in the international system." Liu pointed to the development of "mutual understanding" between the Foreign Ministers since the inception of the trilateral process as a key outcome of the talks. MFA public statements echoed the emphasis on the increasingly formal structure of the trilateral meetings. Liu acknowledged there was significant overlap with the SCO, with the notable exception that security measures, beyond general discussion on counter-terrorism measures, are not on the trilateral agenda.

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16. (C) MFA Eurasia Department Russian Affairs Division Director Wu Xiaoying, currently on loan to the Research Institute for Petroleum Exploration and Development, also told Poloff the forum is useful for coordination on issues of mutual interest to all three parties. Such issues, while not abundant, do exist, she said, especially economic cooperation on energy and Central Asian pipelines. Still, Wu pointed to the SCO as the primary forum for Sino-Russian interaction on these and other issues. Both Wu and Liu underscored that the trilateral meetings should not be interpreted as an anti-U.S. platform.

17. (C) Russian Emboff Agafonov said that the Harbin Joint Communiqué calls for the three countries to consolidate Ministerial efforts with a follow-on forum at the Director-General level. Agafonov said the Working Group meetings would form a "more structured forum for coordination" among the three countries. He added that because the order of meetings dictates that Russia host the follow-on meeting, Russia has the "presidency" of the group until then. He stressed that the recent trilateral was not only the seventh such meeting, but was the third time the meeting was held as a free-standing event.

Promoting Multilateral and Multi-polar Solutions

18. (C) MFA-affiliated China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) scholar Chen Yurong noted to Poloff that China was not initially interested in joining the trilateral forum when it was proposed by Russian Premier Primakov in the late 1990s, but that the trilateral talks are now seen primarily as a useful vehicle. Chen noted that China now emphasizes whenever possible the importance of multilateral frameworks for solving international problems. FM Yang, in his public statement after the trilateral meeting, pointed to "promoting the multi-polarization of the world" as an important role of

the cooperation between the three countries, suggesting the Chinese view the forum as another vehicle to emphasize multilateral diplomacy and present to the West a unified consensus on their multi-polar worldview.

India: "No Harm in Talking to People"

¶9. (C) By contrast, an Indian Embassy contact played down the significance of the latest trilateral meeting in Harbin, observing that little of substance came from the meeting. Though the Chinese and, to a lesser degree, the Russians are interested in the Director-General "consultation mechanisms" in the foreign and other ministries as a means of institutionalizing the trilateral dialogue, our Indian contact expressed skepticism that these channels would amount to more than "smaller talking shops under larger talking shops." He explained, however, that the Indians will continue to participate in these meetings, stating "there's no harm in talking to people."

India-China Bilateral Meeting "Nothing Special"

¶10. (C) MFA Asia Department India Division Deputy Director Zhao Lijian and our Indian Embassy contact minimized the significance of the brief bilateral meeting between Chinese FM Yang Jiechi and Indian External Affairs Minister Mukherjee immediately following the trilateral meetings. Deputy Director Zhao described the bilateral meeting as routine and "nothing special." He lent no particular significance to the formation of a working group on the border issues, one of the outcomes of the 11th round of the Special Representative Mechanism. Our Indian Embassy contact concurred, saying the working group, still to be formed, represents an effort by both sides to show continuing progress on the slow-moving border discussions. Both interlocutors agreed that FM Yang's call for "an early agreement" on the border dispute is simply repetition of China's previous statements on the issue.

Sonia Gandhi's Visit Mainly "Atmospheric"

¶11. (C) Separately and on a related issue, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) International Department North American Affairs Division Deputy Director Wang Yingchun on November 2 told us that India Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi's October 25-29 visit "strengthened ties" between the two parties and between India and China, but admitted that discussions on economic development, party building and poverty reduction did not yield any substantive agreements or practical initiatives. Similarly, an Indian Embassy contact told us

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that since Sonia Gandhi has no state role in bilateral affairs, her visit concentrated on "atmospherics."

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